Lecture on Technion's
Architecture"

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Humboldt, the famous explorer and geographer of the early 19th Cent., called the situation of three places the most beautiful in the World: Constantinople with the Bosporus, Naples with Capri, Salzburg in Austria. If he would have seen the site of the New Technion with its mountainous background, inmidst a forest and a sea of flowers, overlooking the large blue bay, he perhaps would have conferred the same distinction to the organically growing Technion City. In its correlation with landscape it is doubtless a masterwork of planning, offering to research and learning the best aesthetical conditions possible.

But, although I am a historian of architecture, I shall not speak to you about features of the exterior or the interior of buildings, but rather on Art at the Technion. From 1947 to 1958 I taught there History of Art and Architecture, from 1958 until 1960 only History of Art.

One common line was in my teaching of both closely connected subjects: It was my aim to give, on the base of existing literature and my own researches, a scientific idea of the historical tradition rooted in the Land of Israel and in Jewish culture together with world-wide knowledge. To begin with the latter, the task was not a one-sided mediterranean and european history as still given in most of the scientific and semi-scientific books, but a geographically universal development drawn from prehistorical ages until our days. This practically unlimited subject should have its natural center neither in Greece nor in Italy, but in Israel.

This means, from the special view point of teaching young architects, first of all to understand the particular natural conditions of the Land of Israel, to see and to show the problems resulting from these conditions and to study the solutions found since early antiquity.

One of these natural conditions of Israel and other southern countries, the thermic one, is so generally known and recognized by experts and laymen, that there was no need to underline it. All engineers and architects of Israel correctly strive for diminishing the heat of the long summer. The practically unsolved problem of archit. in Israel is not the thermical, but the optical one.

When visiting there you protect your eyes by sunglasses since the intensity of light is incomparable to that of any northern country. It penetrates also into buildings and attacks our eyes everywhere. This intensity of light is not only a physical attack. Psychologically too it is ~~a~~ extremely disturbing ~~factor. It is highly interesting to compare~~ one of the factors which prevent harmony and happiness. It is highly interesting to compare modern understanding of this fact and modern handling of this problem with ancient approach and ancient solutions. By a few instances we can convince ourselves that antiquity was much more progressive or if you prefer to call it so, much more modern that our generation.

In ancient India f.-i. or in old Mesopotamia you find ~~of~~ ingenious systems of façades reducing the ~~light~~ reflected light by means of shadow and color. The archit. of Israel like that of all the Near East excelled especially in its Roman period by wonderful means to reduce the strain of the eyes by ornamentically sculptured exteriors and logical use of color outside and inside.

At the outside this was accomplished by a system which was also a unique aesthetical achievement. It was a network ~~a net~~ of protruding patterns surrounded by and ~~interchanging~~ alternating with deeply bored parts. So a small part of the exterior remained lighted, while its bigger part changed into benefitting darkness. In addition to the optical and aesthetical advantages of this great invention the enlarging of the surfaces and the net of shadows influenced the temperature of the interior too. Masterpieces of this were the giant Roman temple of Baalbek in Syria, the Synagogue of Capernaum ~~at~~ on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and the Palace of Mshatta near the Dead Sea. Let me remark that system of dense ornaments made by deep carving, invented for the purposes of the exterior, was applied also inside and ~~the~~ influenced monumental sculpture. From its eastern bases it conquered Roman archit. and sculpture in Italy too.

Israeli modern architects, however, were educated in Northern countries which need more light and always strived for technical and aesthetical means to enlarge openings, even for the price of their thermic convenience. One of the greatest deeds of European spirit, *Gothic architecture* which had several technical, aesthet. and spirit. sources is not understandable without considering this need for more light. In Italy where light is much stronger than in Northern France, the cradle of Goth arch., it had a quite diff. character, partic. by moderate or even small windows. ~~Here~~ ~~where~~ ~~the northern striving for the possible maximum of light is less justif~~ So Italian architects understood well the needs of their country. Modern Israel architects, however, imported into Israel cruelly white and plain exteriors, large windows and bright interiors which never enable the eyes to rest. This brought into my teaching a factor of fighting. So one of my aims was to show to learning architects how ancient times created healthy optical (and psychological) conditions and how modern arch. could and should take advantage of ancient achievements: *Archit. should help to the people of Israel to be happy in its country.* In articles and lectures I claimed partic. for *color* and shadow in archit. Recently color indeed appears, since many arch. were my students and others read and heard me in Radio. But I couldn't say that this

now appearing color is what I meaned. I had outlined a system of coloring buildings which is quite diff. from use of color in painting and from any arbitrariness.

Let me content myself with this reference to archit. and its history and tell you something about Hist. of Art. Here too my line was always what could be called Jewish Universalism.